



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

MEXICAN NATIONAL SENTENCED TO 135 MONTHS IN JAIL

Enhanced sentence imposed for falsely claiming to be a U.S. citizen

GULFPORT, Miss. — A Mexican national illegally in the United States was sentenced here to 135 months in prison for possession with intent to distribute more than seven pounds of cocaine, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Normally, Marcelo Banuelos-Gutierrez would have received a sentence of 70 to 87 months. However, he received an enhanced sentence of an additional 48 to 65 months for obstructing justice due to him falsely claiming to be a U.S. citizen.

ICE special agents in Gulfport received a request for assistance from the Harrison County Sheriff's Office, to assist with the investigation of Yolanda Chavez and passenger Johnny Joe Juarez of San Antonio, Texas. Chavez and Juarez were found to be in possession of about six kilograms of cocaine concealed inside a compartment located in their vehicle's front driver's side wheel well.

Chavez and Juarez were subsequently arrested and charged with knowingly and intentionally possessing with intent to distribute a controlled substance. During the initial appearance, Juarez stated he was a U. S. citizen. However, further investigation identified Juarez to be Marcelo Banuelos-Gutierrez, a citizen of Mexico, who had illegally entered the United States without inspection.

Marcelo Banuelos-Gutierrez appeared before United States District Judge Walter J. Gex III, in the Southern District of Mississippi in May. Banuelos-Gutierrez pleaded guilty to knowingly and willfully conspiring together with others to intentionally possess with intent to distribute more than 3.5 kilograms of cocaine hydrochloride.

"ICE and its law enforcement partners are determined to do everything possible to stop the flow of illegal drugs into the United States and to the State of Mississippi," said Michael A. Holt, Special Agent-in-Charge of ICE investigations in New Orleans. "We will continue to partner with law enforcement agencies to detect such criminal activities and bring these individuals to justice."

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.